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AUTHOR Harrington, Charles
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ABSTRACT

In this society cultural pluralism and social stratification go hand in hand. Status differences among cultural groups can be clearly seen in urban schools, where there may be many different groups and where stereotyping often results. One problem with status stereotypes is that they are not completely fixed in reality. A further problem is that status stereotypes are destructive to, and have no place in, educational planning. When anthropologists make functional data available about other cultures, in the hope of enabling educators to plan and to make more enlightened decisions, they can be creating more stereotypes. Transitional, enrichment, and maintenance models of bilingual education each have different social and cultural implications. In considering these models, it is important to remember that social stratification and cultural pluralism are distinct phenomena, even though they may coincide in our society. Theoretically, schools and education can provide groups with the skills and resources necessary for them to compete more equally in the larger society. Alternatives for the future involve either doing away with structural and cultural pluralism through homogeneity, or making multiculturalism a desirable element of everyone's experience. (Author/GC)

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Bilingual Education, Social Stratification, and Cultural Pluralism

Charles Harrington*

It has been said by a prominent anthropologist that if you know one person and you can specify that person's place in a culture, you know the culture. Today in anthropology we don't make such gross assumptions. Diversity within cultures is a normal phenomenon for humans, and a key theoretical question facing students of culture is how that diversity is organized so that diverse individuals generally act in predictable ways. From a theoretical viewpoint the process of learning a society's culture involves understanding a number of different, or partially different, microcultures and their subcultural variants. Furthermore, one must be able to discern the situations in which the microcultures or their variants are appropriate, as well as the kinds of people to whom different cultural attributions apply, even if the difference is as simple as "us," "not us." One's competence in a subculture can be indicated by one's ability to interact effectively on the terms of that subculture with others who are acknowledged as already competent. Everyone develops varying degrees of multicultural competence (see Goodenough 1976), i.e., we all build into our repertoire a number of coping strategies in order to deal with the amount of diversity we face.

The process of within-culture differentiation, multiculturalism, is greater in urban settings than it is in some of the more simple, idyllic settings that anthropologists used to work with. That is, although life in an urban setting is not qualitatively different from life in any other society, it is certainly quantitatively more complicated. Population density is greater, as is the diversity within that population. A look at a public school in Manhattan will give you an idea of the degree of diversity within that particular urban area. In an elementary school that we were working in recently, twenty different major nationality groups were represented. Within each of these groups, and across them as well, there were many variables that people used to distinguish other people from themselves. One important variable in that particular neighborhood was who happened to be a citizen and who did not. Another was what language one spoke. Phenotype was also important, as was social class (and social class can be defined in terms of education, occupation, or income). For recently migrating students, an important variable is whether they are from urban or rural backgrounds. And religion is always important. One ends up with an incredible number of categories of differentiation.

What happens with such diversity is that something called stereotyping begins. People simplify the world around them by making stereotypes, by lumping people together, by making groups. This is a normal process, as Gordon Allport pointed out in his classic book on prejudice (1954), and one of the ways we get through social life. Since you can't keep all individuals in mind, it's easier somehow to keep groups in mind. These stereotypes sometimes take on, in Edmund Gordon's terms, the characteristics of status differences. In other words, stereotypes can become fixed statuses.

*Charles Harrington is Professor of Anthropology and Education, Teachers College, Columbia University; Deputy Director of the Institute for Urban and Minority Education, Teachers College, Columbia University; Director of the "Bilingual" General Assistance Center, Teachers College, Columbia University; and Editor of *Anthropology & Education Quarterly*.

One of the problems with status stereotypes is that they are not as fixed in reality as they are in their attribution. That is, we may think of another person on the basis of one status characteristic, while he or she thinks of himself or herself as five or six of what we might call ethnic identities. If you watch children in fourth and fifth grade, you'll see something of what I'm talking about. Children in a sense negotiate their multiculturalism. In a particular setting they may choose to emphasize the fact that they are Spanish-speaking; in another setting they may choose to emphasize the fact that they are Puerto Rican, as opposed to Dominican. In another setting they may choose to emphasize yet another variable.

A further problem is that status stereotypes are destructive to, and have no place in, educational planning, as Gordon has indicated. You do not plan on the basis of status or stereotyping characteristics. For educational planning you must rely on functional characteristics, that is, on how a child performs, as may be determined by mental, social, and physical conditions. But how do you assess functional characteristics, particularly when dealing across language groups? The problem of assessment becomes crucial, and it's one of the things that will be a major theme in the Institute for Urban and Minority Education in the future.

It's one thing to say that we must plan education on the basis of functional characteristics, and quite another thing to be sure that our measures of those functional characteristics in fact measure what they say they are going to for the particular group involved. We must also be sensitive to the point that functional characteristics can themselves be perceived by others as simply new forms of status characteristics. Instead of breaking up the world into black/white, rich/poor, it could be broken up in terms of smart/not smart, as Huxley foresaw in *Brave New World*, monolingual/bilingual, etc., based on some particular measurement of some particular functional characteristic.

One of the frustrations anthropologists face is that when they make functional data available about other cultures, in the hope of enabling educators to do more enlightened planning and decision making about those cultures, they can be creating more stereotypes. An example is the American Indian Schools during the early forties. Letter grades of A, B, and C were routinely being given to the students, in conflict with their culture which valued harmony (that is, no differences amongst individuals). Thus, if a student got an A, he or she immediately stopped working as hard so as not to be different from the other "average" students. I would argue that certain kinds of fundamental information like this about value systems and belief systems in particular cultures are, in fact, helpful to educators in terms of educational planning, but the difficulty is that sometimes these descriptions of other cultures become simply more refined but equally false stereotypes, e.g., all Indians value harmony. The problem is how to talk about cultures or subcultures without simply providing yet more sophisticated ways to distinguish the groups among ourselves with more stereotypes. To pursue the point, *La Vida* (Lewis 1965) is *not* a description of all Puerto Rican life either in Puerto Rico or the United States. Not all Chicanos are field dependent, whatever Ramirez' and Castanada's (1974) findings may have to say about individuals. Not all blacks live in *Tally's Corner* (Liebow 1967).

In a sense, what I'm saying here is that when we talk about cultural differences we talk about the way in which we are like *some* other people. But always remember that two other levels are also operating. In some ways I am like *no* other person, and in some ways we are like *all* other people. Whatever we know about a group's shared characteristics, the other levels cannot be ignored through stereotyping. In thinking of children, whatever culture a child is from, he or she is human, able to learn, able to think, and able to feel; and cultural differences are small compared to these similarities. In other ways a particular child is like no other, and knowing something about the particular culture from which the child comes does not excuse educators from their obligation to know the child as an individual, unique from other individuals, and to respond to the child's own special needs with a personally designed plan of instruction.

I'd like to turn now to one other major distinction, and that's a distinction between cultural pluralism and social stratification. The former is simply a statement about multiculturalism, the recognition that there is equal validity in the numerous ways of living, and that there are different value systems and belief systems, inherent in multiculturalism. By social stratification I mean that a society is structured in such a fashion as to give different groups different access to its socioeconomic resources. Theoretically, one can have cultural pluralism, without such stratification. But, with reality intervening, one discovers that all too often cultural pluralism coincides to some degree with social stratification. That is, in terms of distribution of resources, some cultural groups wind up on top of the heap, and others end up on the bottom.

In South Africa, for example, the government supports education in the native tongue. This has been resisted by the people who want instruction in English, a reversal of the United States' patterns of the 60s. Some outsiders have found this situation hard to understand. But South African behavior seems to me to be eminently rational. Take it from the point of view of the government. The language policy of only educating in tribal languages outside of the major towns is a policy clearly designed to make sure that cultural pluralism and social stratification coincide; that is, that the people do not learn the skills

[1] Incidentally, the assessment instruments themselves can become stereotypes and can be used to make status characteristics. The study, *Pygmalion in the Classroom*, is a good example of how a functional characteristic can become a status characteristic. The authors labeled children in terms of IQ test scores and found, according to some analyses of their data, that teachers responded to students in terms of what they perceived their IQ test scores to be. At the end of the year, when the children were retested, those students whom the teachers had been told had higher IQ test scores than they in fact had, scored higher in response to teacher expectation.

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(English) necessary to get more resources. In other words, the language policy perpetuates white supremacy.

The desire for instruction in English as opposed to Afrikaans amongst blacks close to Johannesburg is, I would argue, a reasonable attempt on their part to make sure that cultural pluralism and social stratification do *not* coincide. It may be true that Afrikaans and English are equally elite languages in South Africa; but given the way South Africa is structured, if I were black, it would be a rational strategy for me to try to get out of South Africa to earn resources. I would be less able to leave South Africa if I knew only Afrikaans. But if I knew English, a greater number of opportunities would be available to me. In other words cultural pluralism 'sounds great', but when, historically, it has also been attached to social stratification, so that certain groups have done better and others have done worse, cultural pluralism can sentence you to permanent oppression.

Now, theoretically, schools and education are one way in which we can provide groups with the skills and resources necessary for them to compete more successfully in the larger society. *Can* is different from *do*. I have written at various times about my occasional pessimism on this particular point. I did a study of textbooks used in rural, urban, and suburban school districts in New York State. It turned out that there was the least information about how to participate in politics (about how to vote) in the urban New York district. There was the least information about minority rights in the very districts with minority students but a lot of information about minority rights in wealthy suburban districts. This pattern does not give one much cause for optimism about the way in which schools might uniformly provide opportunities for more successful competition within either the world of politics or the world of economics.

It is also worth pointing out that, in terms of cultural pluralism and social stratification, varying models of bilingual education have different results. Compensatory, or *transitional*, models of bilingual education, for example, do not foster cultural pluralism, but these models are supposedly trying to get at the stratification problem. In other words, this type of bilingual education provides students with more equal opportunity to acquire skills that will then enable them to compete for resources in the larger society where the action is said to be. *Enrichment* models of bilingual education do foster cultural pluralism, but they do not in their ideology deal directly with the issue of social stratification. *Maintenance* models, if they are truly bilingual, are in fact trying to get at both cultural pluralism and structural pluralism. That is, they are trying to foster cultural and linguistic pluralism at the same time that they are providing students with the skills necessary to get resources within the larger society. Realistically, because of funding and other issues, true maintenance programs are relatively rare.

I think that we also ought to be sensitive to one other point, that is, that schools cannot be expected to do all the work. Yes, schools might be one way of redressing some previous imbalances, of making sure that skills are more widely disseminated across cultural and subcultural groups; but schools account for only a part of the day and for only a small part of what happens to the child. Also, what goes on in school is embedded in a much larger context.

For example, I was once observing an ESL classroom in which the students were predominantly Spanish-speaking. The teacher's sole job was to try to get the children to speak English. An Egyptian child came to the school who spoke neither Spanish nor English; and for reasons best known to history he was put into this particular classroom. After a month in the ESL classroom, the Egyptian child was speaking *Spanish*. That child knew whom he had to get along with and knew what he had to do to get along, and his coping strategies were not necessarily limited to the classroom. They happened outside of the classroom (and informally in the back of the room) without the teacher's knowledge. So let's not fool ourselves. We may plan curricula, but we must be sensitive to the hidden curricula which often are far more potent than the planned, but reflective of the kind of learning experiences discussed above.

Furthermore, as schools are embedded in the social system, they are also part of the problem. I was talking recently with a district superintendent who called for a reference for one of my students. During the course of the conversation I took the opportunity to plug the Bilingual General Assistance Center, the Desegregation General Assistance Center, and all the things that the Institute for Urban and Minority Education could do for him. He said, "Oh we don't have any problems at all with integration. We don't have *any* blacks or any Spanish-speaking people in our district." Now the singular myopia that can lead a district superintendent to say that he has no problems with integration simply because he himself is running a segregated school system is an interesting problem. But what it also suggests is that the schools themselves are enmeshed in a larger series of legal and geopolitical phenomena. Changing a school will not change the population distribution within a school district such as the one I have just described.

Now we come upon two interesting alternatives for the future. Two different things seem possible. Let us assume that we are going toward a model whereby social stratification does not coincide with cultural pluralism, that is, where social class and cultural characteristics do not coincide, and there are an equal number of upper-class, middle-class and lower-class people across all cultural and subcultural groups. Abner Cohen (1974) would argue that in that case cultural pluralism will decline. That is, cultural differences will not be important anymore; the really important differences will be social class differences. In other words, if you do away with structural pluralism, you will also do away with cultural pluralism. An alternative argument, however, would be that if in fact there were equal numbers of upper-class, middle-class, and lower-class people in all cultural groups, it would mean that there would

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be equal numbers of leaders—political, economic, and so on—from each of the various groups. In order to function in that kind of society, one would have to have a greater repertoire of multicultural skills. But if somebody grew up in the kind of relatively monocultural school district that we just talked about and only learned how to deal with white middle-class people, he or she would not be able to get as far ahead as someone who knew how to deal with many different cultural repertoires. To turn the tables on the educational establishment, such students lacking a repertoire of multicultural skills would be thought of as "multiculturally deprived," in a truly pluralistic society. In such societies, students with more multicultural experience would be favored; and cultural pluralism would remain.

Since structural pluralism and cultural pluralism go together at the moment, we cannot know which alternative is correct. It is my hope that one day we will be able to learn.

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